

Message Text

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ACTION EUR-12

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-05 H-01 INR-07
L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15
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FM AMCONSUL QUEBEC
TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 1089
INFO AMEMBASSY OTTAWA PRIORITY
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AMCONSUL TORONTO

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E.O. 11652: N/A
TAGS: PGOV, PINT, CA
SUBJ: PQ UNVEILS REFERENDUM WHITE PAPER

REF: QUEBEC 0236

1. SUMMARY: WHITE PAPER ON REFERENDUM TABLED YESTERDAY IN NATIONAL ASSEMBLY IS INITIAL STEP TOWARD QUEBEC'S FIRST LAW GOVERNING CONDUCT OF REFERENDA, INCLUDING EVENTUAL REFERENDUM ON INDEPENDENCE PROMISED BY PQ. AS IT STANDS NOW, DECK IS STACKED IN FAVOR OF PQ GOVERNMENT. END SUMMARY.

2. MINISTER FOR PARLIAMENTARY REFORM ROBERT BURNS TABLED YESTERDAY (AUGUST 24) LONG-AWAITED REFERENDUM WHITE PAPER, BASIC ELEMENTS OF WHICH LEAKED SEVERAL WEEKS AGO (REFTEL). WHITE PAPER IS BASED HEAVILY, ACCORDING TO BURNS, ON 1975 BRITISH REFERENDUM ON ENTRY INTO EEC, AND CONSTITUTES ONLY A STATEMENT OF GOVERNMENT INTENT. PUBLIC HEARINGS WILL START OCTOBER 12, AND ENABLING LEGISLATION WILL BE INTRODUCED IN DECEMBER.

3. HIGHLIGHTS FOLLOW:
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--REFERENDA WILL BE CONSULTATIVE IN NATURE AND RESULTS NOT LEGALLY BINDING ON THE GOVERNMENT. HOWEVER, ACCORDING TO BURNS, RESULTS WOULD BE "MORALLY" BINDING AND A GOVERNMENT WOULD IGNORE THEM AT ITS OWN PERIL.

--ONLY THE GOVERNMENT WOULD HAVE THE POWER TO CALL A REFERENDUM,

ALTHOUGH THE POSSIBILITY OF CALLING ONE BY POPULAR INITIATIVE IS LEFT OPEN FOR "SERIOUS FUTURE STUDY."

--QUESTION OR QUESTIONS WOULD BE PHRASED BY THE GOVERNMENT THROUGH ITS MAJORITY IN THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY. ASSEMBLY DEBATE ON PHRASING WOULD BE LIMITED TO 25 HOURS MAXIMUM.

--GENERAL ELECTION PROCEDURES WOULD BE FOLLOWED FOR THE VOTING. DATE OF REFERENDUM WOULD BE SET BY THE GOVERNMENT, WITH BETWEEN 35 AND 60 DAYS ALLOWED FOR THE CAMPAIGN.

--ANY INDIVIDUAL, GROUP, OR POLITICAL PARTY WISHING TO PARTICIPATE IN THE CAMPAIGN WOULD HAVE TO REGISTER WITH AD HOC COMMITTEES TO BE SET UP ONCE QUESTIONS ARE FORMULATED. A COMMITTEE WOULD BE FORMED TO SUPPORT EACH OPTION (IF THERE WAS ONLY ONE REFERENDUM QUESTION WITH A SIMPLE YES OR NO OPTION,

THEREFORE, ONLY TWO COMMITTEES WOULD BE PERMITTED). ALL POLITICKING WOULD BE CHANNELLED THROUGH AND AUTHORIZED BY SUCH COMMITTEES.

--CAMPAIGN FINANCING WOULD BE IN CONFORMITY WITH BILL 2, BURNS' PROPOSED ELECTORAL REFORM LAW WHICH HAS NOT YET BEEN PASSED. EACH COMMITTEE WOULD BE ALLOWED TO SPEND UP TO \$0.50 PER VOTER. THE GOVERNMENT WOULD PROVIDE A START-UP CONTRIBUTION TO EACH COMMITTEE.
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--AS PROVIDED IN BILL 2, ONLY VOTERS AND RECOGNIZED POLITICAL PARTIES WOULD BE ALLOWED TO CONTRIBUTE FUNDS TO THE CAMPAIGN. CORPORATIONS, LABOR UNIONS AND OTHER GROUPS, INCLUDING THOSE FROM OUTSIDE QUEBEC, WOULD NOT BE PERMITTED TO CONTRIBUTE FUNDS.

4. INITIAL OPPOSITION REACTION TO THE WHITE PAPER HAS BEEN RELATIVELY CAUTIOUS. LIBERAL PARLIAMENTARY LEADER JEAN-NOEL LAVOIE PREDICTED A LONG, EMOTIONAL DEBATE WHICH WOULD PARALYZE THE ASSEMBLY MUCH THE WAY THAT BILL 101 HAS, THEREBY KEEPING THE ASSEMBLY FROM TACKLING VITAL ECONOMIC ISSUES. UNION NATIONALE LEADER RODRIGUE BIRON DECLARED THAT TOO MUCH CONTROL WAS BEING GIVEN TO THE GOVERNMENT IN PHRASING THE REFERENDUM QUESTION. HE CITED A HYPOTHETICAL CASE WHEREBY THE UN MIGHT HAVE TO DEFEND THE CONSTITUTIONAL STATUS QUO AS OPPOSED TO SOVEREIGNTY-ASSOCIATION, WHEN IT BELIEVED IN NEITHER OPTION. BIRON PROPOSED PLACING THE RESPONSIBILITY FOR FORMULATING REFERENDUM QUESTIONS IN THE HANDS OF A NON-POLITICAL, NON-PARTISAN "REFERENDUM COUNCIL."

5. COMMENT: THE GOVERNMENT HAS CLEARLY STACKED THE DECK IN ITS OWN FAVOR. IT CAN CHOOSE TIMING OF REFERENDUM AND WORDING OF QUESTION TO SUIT ITS OWN PURPOSES. DISPARATE GROUPS FROM ALL

PARTS OF POLITICAL SPECTRUM WOULD HAVE TO COALESCE INTO A SINGLE COMMITTEE OPPOSING, FOR EXAMPLE, QUEBEC INDEPENDENCE WHEREAS PQ COULD RAMROD THE YES VOTE RELATIVELY EASILY. CAMPAIGN FUNDING PROVISIONS SEVERELY LIMIT ACTIVITIES OF CORPORATIONS AND FEDERALIST GROUPS FROM OUTSIDE QUEBEC ON WHAT IS, AFTER ALL, A NATIONAL ISSUE.

6. FURTHERMORE, WHITE PAPER LEAVES A GREAT MANY QUESTIONS UNANSWERED. WILL, FOR EXAMPLE, MORE THAN ONE QUESTION BE ALLOWED? WHAT HAPPENS WHEN DEPUTIES FAVOR NEITHER OR NONE OF PROPOSED OPTIONS? HOW ARE ABSTENTIONS TO BE EVALUATED? QUESTIONS SUCH AS THESE WILL HAVE TO BE ANSWERED IN THE COURSE OF THIS FALL'S DEBATE IN ORDER TO AVOID CHALLENGES TO THE LEGITIMACY OF THE REFERENDUM. THE ONLY THING NOW CERTAIN IS THAT THE MARATHON LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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BILL 101 DEBATE WILL SEEM LIKE A SPRINT COMPARED TO THIS ONE.

7. COPIES OF WHITE PAPER BEING POUCHED TO ADDRESSEES.
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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 01-Jan-1994 12:00:00 am
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Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: SOVEREIGNTY, REFERENDUMS
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Decaption Date: 01-Jan-1960 12:00:00 am
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 22 May 2009
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
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